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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
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SUBJECT: MOI ATMAR - IMAGE VERSUS REALITY IN A MINISTRY
THAT RESISTS CHANGE

REF: KABUL 2981

Classified By: Ambassador William Wood for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. President Karzai appointed Mohammad Hanif Atmar as Minister of Interior (MOI) in mid-October. He charged Atmar with showing progress on a very narrow range of political goals within a tight timeframe. That narrow list of security priorities has now multiplied as Atmar realizes the challenges that face him. Atmar has a reputation for competence, intelligence, and charisma, and has strong support in the international community (IC). Besides the challenge of reforming a corrupt ministry that has little public support, Atmar also faces additional bureaucratic hurdles resulting from his management style and Afghan tribal competition. The new minister has shown energy, initiative and creativity in his short tenure, but we fear that Atmar's Karzai-inspired political agenda and expanding list of sometimes unrealistic goals may undermine longer-term MOI reform efforts. End Summary.

THE HALO EFFECT

¶2. (C) When Atmar took over MOI in October, it was widely seen as a corrupt ministry, despite significant progress accomplished under Atmar's predecessor, Moqbal Zarar. Under Zarar (and with the help of CSTC-A and the IC), Afghanistan developed its first truly national police force, the Afghan National Police (ANP). A plan was developed for internal reform of the MOI, and some steps were taken in that direction. The Focused District Development (FDD) program became a prototype for police training, and pay and rank reform eliminated thousands of former "officers" who often did little but cash their paychecks. An Electronic Payroll System and Electronic Funds Transfer pushed meddling supervisors looking for their cut out of the payroll chain and delivered pay directly to the employees. Nonetheless, Zarar was seen as a weak leader who had done little to ferret out corruption and change the image of the MOI and ANP.

¶3. (C) Atmar's appointment was seen by the IC as a step forward and set expectations high. He had been successful in his previous tenures as Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and Minister of Education, and was seen as competent and decisive when faced with difficult decisions. He speaks flawless English and knows how to charm internationals. Atmar has since said that he did not want the position at MOI, but accepted it because the President asked him. He has also said that time is not on his side - Karzai set the MOI priorities (security in big cities and on highways, the fight against corruption, kidnapping and organized crime, and election security) and gave him until

the Fall elections to show results.

POLITICS TRUMP INSTITUTION BUILDING

14. (C) Two months into his tenure, Atmar,s appointment still offers hope, but the reality of the challenges he faces, along with the political priorities and ambition that drive him and the President, make his ultimate success at MOI look less likely. First and foremost, Atmar repeatedly reminds everyone that he has only so-many months left to accomplish his goals. Atmar has never indicated he would stay at MOI beyond elections, which might weaken the long-term institution building that the GIROA and MOI most need. We understand that there is grumbling among uniformed officers not only because of the Minister,s short-term personal agenda, but also because he reportedly marginalizes their participation in high-level planning.

15. (C) Atmar,s personal charisma and smarts have had a positive impact on the image of MOI. He has railed against corruption within the Ministry. He has taken steps in the right direction by approving a new organizational chart and passing it on to the Cabinet. He has called for field audits of ANP units to conduct end-use monitoring of equipment and confirm payroll accountability. He provided pay parity with the Afghan National Army (ANA) by convincing the Law and Order Trust Fund of Afghanistan (LOTFA) to increase ANP salaries by 20 dollars (with funds actually provided by CSTC-A). e wants to install an internal system to conduc personal asset inventories of MOI officials o compare assets

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with income, and has announced plans for a merit-based appointment system. New units to fight kidnapping and organized crime are in the process of being created.

16. (C) The list of challenges, however, is daunting. It may be those very challenges that have led Atmar to expand his list of priorities. To the initial list of Karzai,s political priorities Atmar has added acceleration of FDD, reinforcing MOI,s intelligence gathering and investigative capabilities, enlarging the ANP, and creating a public guard force within the MOI but outside of its personnel authorization (Tashkil). He talks about more and better equipment, increasing the ANP food allowance and providing incentive pay for those serving in medium- and high-risk districts. Atmar,s short-term focus and impatience with the slow ace of MOI reform have even led him to request hat the U.S. and IC provide him with up to 35 professionals to work for him within the Ministry as auditors and inspectors.

17. (C) Atmar,s short-term political agenda and lack of focus are complicated by tribal competition at the national level. MOI has traditionally been seen by Tajiks as "their" ministry - previous Minister Zazar was Tajik and many upper-level officials are Tajik. Karzai,s appointment of Atmar, a Pashtun, was not popular within the ministry.

18. (C) Atmar has repeatedly told the IC that he will take care of the problem of "ghost police," those officers who pull a paycheck but are not on duty. He has outlined a plan to move disabled and dead policemen off the rolls and to provide widow and disabled pensions through an Afghan government budget. But the plan has not been implemented. He likely will be successful in accelerating FDD and creating an incentive pay program since those would both receive initial funding from the United States. Personnel changes at the European Police Mission (EUPOL) and among other IC players are showing signs of reinvigorating the moribund International Police Coordination Board (IPCB), and Atmar as Chair of the Board could turn the IPCB into the high-level police advisory body it was always intended to be. Kabul security will likely improve since he has kept 700 Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), one-third of the best

trained police force in Afghanistan, in the capital city, even though this reduces the ANCOP forces available to backfill for the ANP units sent off to FDD training. Progress is being made on creation of specialized units to fight kidnapping and organized crime so that, if incidents of such crimes go down, he may be able to take credit.

COMMENT

19. (C) Atmar,s ever-expanding list of priorities may dilute his focus and reduce his chances for success. His proposal to increase the size of the ANP while cleaning house at the same time will require significant IC financial and political support. The proposal to create a "public guard force" within the MOI but outside of the Tashkil has almost no support at all.
WOOD